

IT'S ALL ABOUT ATTITUDE

During this Police Week when we honor and commemorate law enforcement officers, past and present, I think it is fitting to discuss the mental well-being of our currently serving officers.

Attitude is a manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that shows one's disposition.

A proper attitude will go a long way toward making your job easier and more manageable; relieve you of stress; minimize criticism; and make your job more rewarding.

I will offer you my thoughts for a proper police attitude towards yourself and the job, your family, your extended law enforcement family, the public, and the justice system.

First and foremost, recognize and appreciate that you have been given a great public trust, a privilege bestowed on only a small fraction of one percent of our population.

Strive to be a leader, an example, and a role model in everything you do. You are recognized and expected to be that. That is why it is newsworthy when a police officer, or even a member of a police officer's family, stumbles.

Do not take criticism to heart. Remember there are bad apples in every profession – do not feel ashamed for what a few discrediting officers do; but you should be ashamed if you witness it and do nothing. Very few police officers are misfits. Do not let them sully your uniform or your attitude.

Never lose your way; your integrity is you. Once you do something illegal, you will continue to do so. You are a virgin only once. Not only should the guiltiest of the guilty be secure in prison, if appropriate, but everyone should also be secure in the knowledge they were put there by a system which has integrity.

Constantly strive for excellence in everything you do. Advanced education and training is the key. Your goal should be professionalism, high standards, integrity, intellectual skill, and technical competence.

Be calm and restrained in violent situations, particularly when provoked, and use no more force than is necessary to carry out your lawful duty.

Do not take yourself too seriously, and be certain to keep things in their proper perspective. You are most vulnerable about the things you cannot see about yourself. Most officers have contact with only other police officers and become myopic in their views. Expand your horizons and engage with non-law enforcement types.

Your family comes first, above the job. Respect your spouse if he or she really does not want to hear all the gory details of your day. Do not interrogate your spouse and children when you come home. Do not be a control freak over your family. They are not perps, and they deserve to be treated like they are the most important persons in your life. In my courtroom, my bailiff tells everyone to stand when I enter. *But I can assure you* in my home, my wife does not stand when I enter the room.

Respect your co-workers, the department leadership, dispatchers, and corrections officers. They all have jobs to do, and can make your job easier or harder if you give them reason.

Share information. Do not hoard case-breaking information to attempt to garner the glory of solving the case. There is no place for territorialism in public safety. It must be a team approach. This is one of the lessons of 9/11 and our antiterrorism effort. One cannot connect the dots if you cannot see all or most of them.

Treat everyone fairly, impartially, and equally, without regard to race, creed, gender, station in life, among others, and with the tolerance, compassion, and dignity you would want under similar circumstances. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” You must balance vigilance for your own safety with alarming the non-threatening citizen or appearing to be a nut – keep in mind that the little old lady you just stopped has no idea her car matches one used in a nearby armed robbery 5 minutes ago and you want to make sure she is not being kidnaped.

Everybody has a job to do. Do yours, and allow everyone else to do theirs. Understand your role in protecting our freedoms. Understand the role of the defense attorney – who may be harsh on you in a court of law as well as in the court of public opinion. Understand that the judges make the rules for you, and that judges are required to uphold the constitution, as you are, and must impartially judge your actions. Understand that judges must scrutinize your every action, even those taken in a split second, while the

judicial process could take months. It is a justice system – a system works best when all of its components function in the way they were intended.

Realize you cannot and will not solve the complex social problem of crime alone. Recognize that crime fighting is a classic struggle of good and evil. You are not responsible for the crime rate in general – whether it rises *or falls*. Many factors and institutions play into the crime rate. You can concentrate on and make a difference in troublesome spots or targeted areas. However, in the bigger picture, you must work with, and not against, the public to improve the quality of life.

Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. Remember that our citizens, crime victims, and jurors watch television shows like CSI and expect miraculous detection of clues and trace evidence, and miraculous deductions and conclusions as to what happened – all in one hour. Do not neglect to go the extra mile in a serious case (basically any felony) and collect more evidence than seems needed – you never know what the defense is or will come up with by the time of trial. Your attitude should be evidence of proof beyond all doubt, to eliminate reasonable doubt.

Know that the public appreciates you and your service. I am a member of the Lake County Blue Coats, which each year honors individuals in the police and fire services for action above and beyond the call of duty. We usually select one incident (it may be a high profile crime that was successfully broken) or an action (such as rescuing persons from a burning home), to honor the officer or officers involved. The nominations come from the chief executive of the department, who explains in a letter to the Blue Coats the action that prompted the nomination.

To those on the selection committee, the action giving rise to the nomination seems *uniquely* special or heroic. *They really do not know any better*. However, for 28 years as a law enforcement officer, a lawyer, and a judge, I know that I have witnessed many, almost daily, acts of special conduct or heroism. In fact, most of the special or heroic actions of law enforcement officers go unnoticed and unrecognized by the public. I know it exists. So do you. And we all consider it just part of the job.

If the 9/11 attacks occurred anywhere else in this country, the safety forces employed there would rise to the occasion the same as the New York City safety forces.

In what other occupation is one expected to make correct, split second, serious and possibly life-and-death decisions, while navigating complicated laws and procedures, to lay his or her life on the line for total strangers, for relatively little compensation, and where every aspect of the activity draws criticism from some segment of the public and scrutiny by the courts? It truly takes a special person to be a police officer!

Let me leave you with this: Be content in doing a difficult job, one that most people in the world could not or would not do, and doing it well. Always remember *that* time early in your career in this job when you would do the job for free, you loved it so much. Be proud of what you do, knowing that you will never be paid what you are worth.

During this National Police Week, I salute you officers for being what you are and for doing what you do.